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ABSTRACT

This paper examines reading research and fosters awareness of limitations in such studies. It begins by discussing the historical aspects of the basal reading program and the language experience and individualized reading approaches. It continues by reporting early studies conducted in these areas, and investigating problems with such studies. The paper then examines reading approaches to the present, discusses their limitations, and presents a brief comparison of past and present ideas. The paper concludes with implications for today's reading teachers, suggesting that a combination of various approaches is advisable. (Contains 57 references.) (EF)

Investigating Reading Approaches: How Much Reliability Can Be Placed in Past and Present Research?

by Ronna Vanderslice

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INTRODUCTION

There are many good reasons why teachers must look critically at research in reading approaches both in the past and in the present. Past research has shaped many reading programs that are still being used today. If limitations of early studies would have been examined critically, they may not have made such an impact in the way we teach reading today. Present research is full of contradictory articles that "prove" one approach is better than the other. In order to establish the reliability of studies in the past and in the present, it is necessary that we examine research studies and become aware of their limitations. By doing this, we will not only become more aware of research in reading approaches, we will also discover how much confidence can be put into various reading studies.

THE PROBLEM

One of the main objectives of virtually every school is to help each student become a "reader". Much research has been done to examine the three main approaches to beginning reading: Basal, Language Experience Approach, and Individualized Instruction. Many "research findings" provide "evidence" that one approach is superior to another. Some is based on factual data, some on teacher and parent opinions, some on the enthusiasm of their originators, and some mainly on hope. Much of the difficulty lies in the definitions of approaches. The variation in definition of all approaches makes it difficult to compare them (Hall, 1977). After all, it does not make sense, nor is it fair to compare apples and oranges. This paper will examine research from the beginning of

these approaches to the present and focus on the prevalent problem we still find today: How much confidence can educators today put into research of different approaches to teaching reading?

THE FORMAT

The remainder of this paper will be organized in the following manner: The historical aspect of each of the three main approaches to teaching reading will be examined. Next will come a report of the early studies conducted in each of these areas. This will be followed by a discussion of some possible problems with the early studies. At this time studies of reading approaches up to the present will be examined. Then will follow a discussion of limitations of these studies. A brief comparison will be presented revisiting articles from the past, looking specifically at their influence on recent studies. A conclusion will follow including implications for teachers today.

DEFINITIONS

For this paper the reading approaches will be defined as follows:

BASAL READER APPROACH - In the basal reader program, the pupil uses a set of textbooks organized in progressive levels of difficulty. Sequential instruction designed to develop word identification and comprehension is provided. Different textbook series vary greatly in their methods of teaching word identification skills and in their use of linguistics and controlled vocabulary (Betts, 1950).

LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE APPROACH - The language experience approach utilizes the child's own language. It is based on materials dictated by the child, which often are collected into an individual's or group's booklet. As his language is recorded, the child begins to realize that what is thought can be spoken, what is spoken can be written down, and what is written down can be read (Allen, 1962). The teacher utilizes the pupil's materials to teach word identification and comprehension skills. Subsequently, pupils advance to reading printed materials (Stauffer, 1970).

INDIVIDUALIZED READING APPROACH - In the individualized reading program, the child selects his reading material from a wide variety of materials provided by the teacher. Each child works at his own pace and on his own reading level. It is based on the premise of self-seeking, self-selecting, and self-pacing (Barbe & Abbott, 1975).

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF READING APPROACHES

It should be noted that this part of the paper is not intended to provide the reader with in-depth studies. These will be examined later in this paper. In this section, the author intends only to present a broad, general overview of how reading approaches have changed throughout history.

Basal Reading Program

The first series of what might be called basal readers appeared in America in 1790, under the authorship of Noah Webster (Spache & Spache, 1986). Prior to this time schools tended to use the same book, such as The New England Primer and similar books, at all grades (Banton-Smith, 1965). Soon other authors followed Webster's example, but it was not until 1840 that the idea of graded readers was developed in the McGuffy series.

The author controlled the difficulty of his books, he believed, by the length of words in the stories. The opening book used only two or three letter words and longer words were gradually introduced in later books. Supplementary readers were introduced about fifty years later in 1890. At that time they took the form of alphabetic systems, phonic systems, sentence or story methods, or literary readers. Little of the content of these early books had any relationship to children's life experiences. More often the books contained moralistic, religious, or patriotic materials obviously intended to instill the proper values of life in the children (Spache & Spache, 1986).

Until about 1910, nearly all classroom reading was oral. A new emphasis on silent reading appeared which necessitated such a different type of training for teachers that a guide had to be devised for them. Teacher's manuals to accompany the readers were written to help teachers present this new mode of learning. The emphasis on silent reading, and therefore, on independent activities, demanded some way of assessing children in seatwork. As a result, workbook exercises were invented (Spache & Spache, 1986).

From the 1930's to the 1960's the McGuffy Readers became regarded as "out of date" and newer readers began to replace them. This era showed mostly suburban settings. The families had a standard "ideal" composition. There is a young mother and father, a brother and sister (Dick and Jane) with a baby sister (Sally), a lovable pet dog (Spot), and a kitten (Puff). The family is always white, middle-class and comfortable.

From the 1960's to the 1970's, a new style in basal reading emerged. From the story settings, characters, and themes to the literary forms, each dimension of the reading series underwent a dramatic change. The settings not only encompassed the city, country,

and suburbs, but included all regions of the United States and each continent of the world. The time of stories was not only contemporary, but frequently was set in the historical past and in the hypothetical future. The characters were now both factual and fictional and represented many ages, socioeconomic levels, races, cultures, times, and places. Selections were tied together by their common themes rather than their common characters (Stever & Steddom, 1979).

Today the coordinated series of textbooks, workbooks, and manuals forms the core of the American reading program (Spache & Spache, 1986). Basals today include a large percentage of award-winning stories (Farr, 1988). They contain specific instructions to teachers on how to use them. Today's basals also mirror a diversity of people and cultures. The selections include various kinds of families, young and old characters from many ethnic and racial groups, and handicapped characters (Cassidy, 1987).

Language Experience Approach

Because of the current widespread attention to the Language Experience Approach, many teachers are under the impression that the practice is quite new. Actually, Hildreth (1965) has shown in her historical review, that it was used in several experimental schools before 1900 and was discussed at considerable length in a yearbook on new materials of instruction in 1920. Nila Banton-Smith (1965) describes something during the 1925-35 time period. "Suggestions for reading activities not connected with the readers usually embraced the following kinds or work: making and reading charts and booklets based on the children's experiences..." (p. 229-230). In her book Teacher, Sylvia Ashton-Warner (1963) describes her "organic method" of reading in which the child tells the teacher an important word he wants to know and the teacher writes it for him. The

child returns to his seat and traces the word and keeps practicing it until it is apart of his sight word vocabulary. This bears quite a resemblance of what we today call language experience. The book was published in 1963, yet in her letter to the editor, she claims to have started this twenty-four years before that, or in 1939.

The term "language experience" was first used in 1934, by which time most of the basic practices of the method had evolved. Teachers have shown great interest in the approach since that time. The language experience approach was the subject of an extensive study conducted in 1964-65, the object of which was to determine whether it produced results that were significantly different than those obtained through the basal reading approach. Interest of pupils was found to increase with this approach. Still today, teachers are trying to find easier ways to incorporate this approach into their classrooms. The word processor has been recommended to be used in conjunction with the Language Experience Approach (Smith, 1985). The Language Experience Approach has also been useful in developing critical thinking skills (Allen, Wright, & Laminack, 1988).

Individualized Reading Approach

The realization that learners show individual differences that affect or modify the teacher's approach was probably a very early experience of the world's first teacher (Spache & Spache, 1986). The origin of the individualized approaches to teaching is difficult to attribute to one man. Some say the history can be traced to Washburn in 1913 when he described the individualized method used in San Francisco and in Winnetka, Illinois (James, 1979). Other literature suggests that John Dewey was the first to initiate a truly child-centered curriculum (Ciaburri, 1975). In contrast to early studies, recent studies have focused on the overall development of the child's reading skills and interests.

This approach traces its origin not so much to the general theory of individualized differences and the earlier experiments, but to a series of principles of child development involving self-seeking, self-selection, and self-pacing (Spache & Spache, 1986). These principles are attributed by leaders of the individualized movement to the research and observations of the child development specialist Willard C. Olson, who first suggested their relevance to the teaching of reading (Barbe & Abbott, 1975).

Still today, advocates speak in favor of the individualized approach to reading instruction (Veatch, 1986). Our obvious concern of educational issues such as the impact of reading upon the learner's personal and social interests, values, and needs, helps "feed the fire" for the need of individualized instruction (Spache & Spache, 1986). Fear of the unknown is probably the only thing that keeps this approach from being number one today. Teachers agree on the need for individualized instruction but are afraid to try something so "new" and unknown.

EARLY STUDIES

The Basal Reading Approach

Up until the First Grade Studies, because of its widespread and commonly accepted use, few studies were done using the basal readers. Gates (1961) argued that basal readers had too much vocabulary control. In his first study, reported by Spache & Spache (1986), some 300 third-grade pupils, who were being taught by the basal reading method, were tested on their knowledge of the third- and fourth-grade words. Gates discovered that on the average, the pupils knew as many fourth-grade as third-grade words. Over half the pupils recognized practically all the third- and fourth-grade

vocabularies. Even the poorest pupils recognized 90 percent as many fourth-grade words as they did third-grade.

A second study by Gates in 1962 repeated this type of evaluation in two classes of average second graders. About 60 percent of the pupils knew 90 percent or more of the basal vocabulary to which they would be introduced in the first four grades. Seventy-five percent of the pupils knew at least 80 percent of this new vocabulary. Even the poorest ten percent of the pupils had learned about half of the total vocabulary before the appropriate grades. This study brought a twinge of doubt to the minds of educators who used only basal readers. Thus evolved the classic First Grade Studies.

Language Experience Approach

One of the early studies (Merriam, 1933) advocated using the experience approach with Mexican-American children whose background made existing books inappropriate. Merriam's (1933) research was a two-year study of eighty primary grade children which placed the instructional emphasis on activities such as handwork, construction, story telling, and dramatization for functional teaching of reading in conjunction with these activities. She concluded that, in general, the data indicated a highly satisfactory achievement of these pupils. Progress was reported in terms of months of progress on reading tests in comparison with months in school, but there was no control group for comparison. Hall (1978) reports that considering two-thirds of the children had IQ scores below 100, the gains stated are impressive.

Hall (1981) notes the term experience method did not appear until 1934 and after that the term language experience was used. After Sylvia Ashton-Warner (1963) wrote about her work in New Zealand, new interest arose in the United States. Language

experience reading surfaced significantly with the work of Roach Van Allen in the 1950's. Through the 1960's instructors using this approach increased considerably, leading up to the landmark First Grade Studies.

Individualized Instruction

The origin of individualized approaches to teaching is difficult to attribute to one man. Some say it can be traced back to Washburn in 1913 when he described the individualized method used in San Francisco and in Winnetka, Illinois (James, 1979). Other literature suggests that John Dewey was the first to initiate a truly child-centered curriculum (Ciaburri, 1975). Aukerman (1984) says the structure of individualized reading as it is today is largely the result of pioneer work in the 1940's by the late Dr. May Lazar. Throughout the 1940's and through the 1960's, little research was done in the area of individualized instruction. The first major studies including individualized reading (called that) were the classic First Grade Studies.

Comparison of Reading Approaches

In early studies Gates, et al. (1926), compared the relative merits of a systematic method and one in which reading instruction was highly individualized. In respect to silent and oral reading, the investigators found that the results favored the systematic approach. However, the results also appeared to indicate that the method with highly individualized reading instruction was advantageous in respect to the development of interests, initiative, determination, and other social traits (Bond & Dykstra, 1967).

In England, Garner (1942) compared an experience-activity, or informal approach, with a formal approach, with children of ages five to eight. Hall (1978) states that Gardner reported no significant differences in achievement in reading, spelling, or

punctuation at the end of the three-year period. Factors such as attitudes, concentration, and social behavior favored the experimental children (informal approach). She also reported a slight tendency in the lower socio-economic levels for the experimental pupils to do more poorly than the controls.

Later, Bond and Dykstra (1967) describe a study (Anderson et al., 1965) which compared a group using highly individualized methods with another using a systematic basal approach. The children in the individualized method groups were introduced to reading when they were ready for it and permitted to choose the books that were read. Some use of basal readers was made with the individualized group, but they were not followed systematically. It should be pointed out that the individualized methods were used in a laboratory school where the average IQ was ten points higher than the public school group using the systematic basal approach. The investigators concluded that "the systematic approach employed by the public schools enables the children to learn to read early and reduces the individual variations in age of learning to read" (Anderson, et al. 1965, p. 107).

In one large-scale investigation reported by Hall (1978), three approaches to the teaching of reading--individualized reading, basal readers, and the language experience approach--were studied during the 1959-60 school year under the Reading Study Project conducted by twelve elementary school districts in San Diego County, California. Sixty-seven teachers participated. The general conclusion of the study was that the language experience approach during the first three years of elementary school can be an effective way of teaching reading. The language experience teachers also found that children made

as much or more progress in reading skills, measured by standardized reading tests, as did children who were taught the skills directly.

In a study of primary reading instruction patterns, Sperry McChristy (1957) found the four classes in the experimental group (individualized method) were superior in total reading gains, vocabulary growth, and comprehension to the four classes in the control group (ability grouped).

In an investigation of individualized reading and the basal approach with primary children, Carline (1960) found no significant differences between the two approaches. Sartain (1960) compared the progress in reading skills of second graders taught by an individualized approach with those taught by a basal reader method. Significant differences were found between methods only for pupils of lower ability under an individualized approach. The methods were reversed after three months, and the investigator found that significantly greater gains were made during the first three months of school, regardless of the method used. In 1960, Safford conducted a study of individualized reading involving seven classes in grades three through six. Results on the California Achievement Battery showed the classes made gains considerably below national or district norms. Safford concluded that, for the majority of the pupils in the class involved, individualized reading resulted in lower gains, and that the use of self-selected reading material methods achieved no significantly different results with pupils of high ability or those with average ability.

In the five-year comparative study of the basal approach, individualized approach, and the language experience approach, Allen (1962) found that children taught by the

language experience approach made as much as or more progress in reading as measured on standardized tests, than did pupils taught through individualized and basal approaches.

It was evident from the wide varieties of results in each study reviewed that little conclusive evidence has been reported concerning the comparative efficiency of the methods of teaching reading. During this time, some of the methods were considered new approaches and had not yet been adequately defined or thoroughly researched. In reviewing these studies, the experimental methods are often variations of a general class of methods, and not totally equivalent, limiting the comparability of the conclusions reported. There is also the limitation of the effects of uncontrolled variables which may have effected the results reported in some of these studies. Because of this, Bond and Dykstra (1967) set out to find superiority in a single method of reading instruction. In the First Grade Studies, each of these early studies was cited, showing the need for additional research.

The First Grade Studies (Bond & Dykstra, 1967), as these came to be known, were a group of twenty-seven research programs funded by the United States Office of Education to examine the effective methods of teaching reading. These studies were made in different localities across the country and represented a good geographical distribution. They were concerned with different problems in each instance, and no study was a duplicate of another. They were directed by individuals with different educational backgrounds, professional training, and various professional positions. More than half of the directors were full-time college professors. A few were senior authors of basic reading series. Some were known to be aggressive advocates of a particular approach.

All of the studies were done in the 1964-65 school year. All used some of the same pretests and post-tests. All ran for approximately 140 school days. The study was done because before this time, little conclusive evidence had been reported concerning the comparative efficiency of the methods of teaching reading.

Below are a few summary statements taken from the First Grade Studies dealing directly with reading approach comparisons. These will be followed by conclusions drawn from the study.

Summary of finds from basal versus non-basal comparisons:

1) Basal programs accompanied by supplementary phonics materials produced significantly greater achievement in reading than did basal materials alone.

2) Relatively few significant differences were found between the language experience and basal approaches. Those significant differences which were found to exist generally favored the language experience approach. However, these sporadic differences were often not of much practical significance in terms of actual reading achievement.

3) The least mature pupils achieved better in a basal program than in a language experience approach, while more capable students profited from a language experience approach.

Conclusions:

1) Combinations of programs, such as a basal program with supplementary phonics materials, often are superior to single approaches. Furthermore, the success of such methods as the language experience approach indicates that the addition of language experiences to any kind of reading program can be expected to make a contribution.

2) Reading programs are not equally effective in all situations. Evidently, factors other than method, within a particular learning situation, influence pupil success in reading.

3) Reading achievement is related to other characteristics in addition to those investigated in this study. Pupils in certain school systems became better readers than did pupils in other school systems even when pupil characteristics were controlled statistically. Furthermore, these differences in achievement from project to project do not seem to be directly related to class, school, teacher, and community characteristics appraised in this study.

4) Future research might well center on teacher and learning situation characteristics rather than method and materials. To improve reading instruction, it is necessary to train better teachers of reading rather than to expect miracles from materials.

5) Children learn to read by a variety of materials and methods. Pupils become successful readers in such vastly different programs as the language experience approach with its relative lack of structure and vocabulary control and the various linguistic programs with their relatively high degree of structure and vocabulary control. Furthermore, pupils experienced difficulty in each of the programs utilized. No one approach is so distinctly better in all situations and respects than the others that it should be considered the one best method and the one to be used exclusively.

6) A writing component is likely to be an effective addition to a primary program.

7) It is impossible to assess the relative effectiveness of programs unless they are used in the same project.

8) The relative success of the non-basal programs compared to the basal program indicates that reading instruction can be improved. It is likely that improvement would result from adopting certain elements from each of the approaches used in this study. The first step would be to determine the elements within the various approaches most important to the success of that program. Perhaps an instructional program which incorporated the most important elements of all the approaches (or a balance of approaches) would be a more effective method of teaching than any currently in use.

9) There is no basis for using test information of the nature employed in this analysis to place pupils differentially in this investigation. A teacher who is successful with a given instructional program will probably be successful with that approach for pupils of varying degrees of readiness and capability.

LIMITATIONS OF EARLY STUDIES

Because of the many variables which were not uniformly controlled in the separate studies, the studies should not be compared to see which ones were most productive. Wide variation was found among the teachers involved. Data were collected on only two teacher variables: years of experience and degrees held. One is led to believe that the Hawthorne effect was in operation because in almost every instance, the experimental populations made significantly greater gains than the control populations.

No one method should be compared with another because the methods were not sharply and clearly defined. For example, all methods included instruction in phonics of one kind or another, the alphabet, writing experiences, comprehension, and so on. Methods that were given the same label were not always the same. Stauffer (1967) points out that an attempt was made to coordinate the Pittsburgh, the Oakland County

(Michigan), and the Delaware studies because each was concerned with the language experience relationships. After two meetings of the directors of the three studies and their assistants, the conclusion was reached that the approaches were similar, but not the same.

Reading instruction time could not be defined adequately for all twenty-seven investigations. In each of the language experience approaches, the entire school day and the entire school curriculum provided opportunity to guide and develop reading efficiency.

The statistical procedures were not uniform from study to study, nor were the methods of reporting. In a future endeavor of this kind, a coordinating center should be responsible for all statistical computation (Stauffer, 1967).

Stauffer also reports that the tests used to measure readiness, intelligence, and achievement were not adequate. Some test results are questionable because the tests used in certain studies were of the homemade variety with no established reliability or validity.

Any attempt to compare method with method or study with study could produce gross misunderstandings and false conclusions. Each study should be examined on its own premises and results, and the reader must be careful that the conclusions he draws do not violate the premises (Stauffer, 1967).

It is important to note that no single approach in these twenty-seven studies has overcome individual differences of eliminated reading disability at the first grade level.

RECENT STUDIES IN READING

(after the First Grade Studies)

Basal Reading Approach

Recent research presents various results as to the success of the basal reader approach. Wright (1975) said 15 to 25 percent of the children he studied had insufficient reading skills and failed to meet the demands of the intermediate grades.

The success of the basal reader approach has been the subject of much debate among various authorities. Research studies have examined areas unique to the basal readers. The early seventies brought a strong decoding program which Chall (1977) felt may have contributed to higher reading achievement.

Vocabulary development has been of great interest to researchers in recent years. Rodenburn and Washburn (1978) report that the greatest change that has occurred in the new basal readers is the abandonment of controlled vocabulary principles. Words are not necessarily repeated several times following their introduction. Research focused on vocabulary development in the current basal reader series indicates a richer vocabulary developed more quickly with fewer repetitions after the introduction of a word.

Many studies have been done in recent years with regard to comprhension development. Durkin (1981) mentioned three studies that had been done to learn what basal manuals do to develop reading comprehension. She reported that they are generous in providing definitions, assessment questions, and practice exercises, but very limited in what they propose for instruction. Her research reflects that there is a need for more actual teaching of skills and procedures, and less need for so much assessment and practice.

In 1986, Smith and Saltz examined on national and local levels teachers' perceptions of basal reading series. A three-page questionnaire was distributed to twenty randomly selected elementary schools in each of the fifty states. All states responded with

a return rate of thirty-nine percent. Their conclusions of the study indicated that teachers exhibit strong perceptions of basal reading series. These perceptions, in turn, influence their behaviors and reactions to basal readers.

In 1988, Cairney interviewed 178 primary school children (aged 5 to 12 years) to investigate their perceptions of the basal reader. These children were selected from fifteen different schools in the Central West of New South Wales, Australia. Similar numbers of boys and girls and an even distribution of subjects from each grade were selected using stratified random sampling.

Questions asked were related to the child's experience and to basal materials they used, which in Australian schools are essentially the same as those used in North American schools. While the content is different, and a small number of books are provided rather than one large text, the philosophy, design, and components are very similar.

Students indicated that one of the most important reasons for reading a basal reader was "to show the teacher how well I can read" (p. 422). They also cited importance of effort, neatness, and behavior in making good grades in reading.

In recent years, basal readers have been "under fire" in education. Concern with the quality and content of basal readers is so widespread that their ridicule has become part of our national folklore (Farr, 1987). Today the main criticism seems to lie with the over-dependence of teachers on the basal, not actually with the basal itself. Southgate (1973) points out that the problems arose with basals when teachers used them as a whole reading program. They became overdependent on workbooks for teaching skills and used excessive oral reading without real purpose. However, their use is still prevalent today.

Auckerman (1981) states that 80 to 90 percent of the schools today use a basal reading series as the primary source of reading instruction.

Language Experience Approach

Oehlkers (1971) studied the contribution of creative writing performance to the reading achievement of four first-grade classes that used the language experience approach. Two experimental classes began writing early in the year, while the control classes did not begin creative writing until the second semester. Hall (1978) reports that Oehlkers found no significant difference in word recognition scores and concluded that students who receive early trainig in creative writing achieve as much word recognition skill as do those who concentrate principally on reading activities during the first half of first grade.

Divergent dialect was the topic of Cagney's (1977) study. She investigated the listening comprehension of forty-eight Black dialect-speaking kindergarten and first grade children when language experience stories were presented in their dialect and in standard English. First grade children made significantly more correct responses than did kindergarten children. For both age levels, there were significantly more correct responses to comprehension questions when stories were presented orally in standard English than when the stories were presented in Black dialect.

Repeating early research studies, Moustafa and Penrose (1985) examined the subject of the language experience approach for use with limited English-speaking students and pointed out its effectiveness.

Individualized Instruction

Barbe and Abott's (1975) book Personalized Reading Instruction presented a "revolutionary approach" to reading instruction. They explain that the Personalized Reading Approach not only teaches children how to read, but also instills in them a life-long love for reading.

A few years later, in 1978, Gusak devised a plan whereby teachers could move from the traditional three-group reading instructional pattern to an individualized program (Auckerman, 1984). Many schools in Texas, as well as some other states, have been using the Gusak approach. The most significant results were reported by Dr. Richard Wubbena, program implementer in schools in Weslaco, Texas, on the Mexican border. In the 1976-77 school year, only 16 percent of the first graders scored above the national norm in reading. After the first year of the Gusak individualized reading approach, 60 percent of the first graders scored above the national norm. Even greater progess was made during the 1978-79 and 1979-80 school years. It is necessary to point out that each of these years was dealing with a new group of students and that other factors could have influenced test scores.

Simpson (1981) cites studies that focus on exceptional children, elementary, secondary, post secondary, and adult students. Bullock and Riag (1979) in their geographically comparative study of the relationship of individualized instruction to the placement of exceptional children state, "individualized instruction methods have made great strides in teaching children who were once labeled as 'failures', 'dropouts', 'retards', and 'dummies' (p. 7).

In 1985, Shannon explains her development and implementation of an individualized program in her first grade clasroom. She cites in her conclusions that she

will never want to teach in groups again. She admits that individualized reading is not for everyone. Although her study is not a scientific one, it does point out the need for and advantages of individualized instruction.

Veatch (1986) sums it up by saying that individualized reading has a strong future. "The day of the basal reader is waning" (p. 592).

Comparisons of Approaches

A year after the First Grade Studies were presented, Dykstra (1968) published a summary of the second-grade phase of the Cooperative Research Program in primary reading instruction.

The United States Office of Education extended thirteen of the studies through the second grade. Follow-up studies were conducted in many of the projects to assess the relative effectiveness of programs after two years of instruction. Assessing achievement at the end of the second grade made it possible to determine whether or not those programs which were superior in pupil achievement after one year of instruction maintained their superiority after a second year in the program.

In general, significant differences were found between the language experience and basal treatments in end-of-second grade achievement. Pupils from the two treatments were found to be similar in spelling ability, language ability, word study skills, paragraph comprehension, and word recognition. The pupils who composed the language experience sample were found to be significantly superior on the Fry Word list, but this superiority in word recognition did not exist on the Stanford Achievement Test. Achievement after two years of instruction in these quite different programs was very similar. The similarity in achievement included the measures of reading, which might

reasonably be expected to favor the basal approach, and measures of writing (spelling and language), which might reasonably be expected to favor the language experience approach (Dykstra, 1967).

There are quite a few limitations of this study which must be pointed out. (Those which are the same as the limitations of the First Grade studies will not be mentioned again.) Dykstra (1967) even points out that terminal reading ability cannot necessarily be predicted on the basis of reading achievement after two years. The possibility exists that programs which appear to be superior in terms of achievement in the first and second grade may lose that superiority in terms of reading ability in later years.

Another limitation of this study is the importance placed on attitudinal aspects of reading compared to the mechanical aspects. Reading ability in this study was evaluated in terms of ability to recognize words, abiltiy to comprehend short paragraphs, and ability to read with speed and accuracy. Standardized tests are available to measure these outcomes. However, argument could be brought out that creating a desire to read is equally or more important (Dykstra, 1967).

A comprehensive review of language experience approach studies was conducted by Hall (1978). Interest in the use of the language experience approach increased. In 1971, Lamb's investigation of the effectiveness of the language experience approach for beginning reading with children in five first grade classes in Indianapolis focused on a culturally disadvantaged population. In this study, the achievement and attitudes of the experimental group were compared to the achievement and attitudes of five control classes which used a modified basal approach. No significant differences in achievement

and attitude were found using the California Reading Test and The Primary Pupil Reading Attitude Inventory.

Henderson, Estes, and Stonecash (1972) studied the size and the nature of the reading vocabulary of 594 pupils in twenty-one first grade classrooms in Maryland, using a language experience reading approach. An analysis of the words accumulated in the word banks of twenty-five subjects showed that half the words were in the first thousand on the Lorge-Thorndike list. These researches concluded that the vocabulary learned by midyear in a language experience program compares favorably with the extent of the vocabulary learned in a basal approach (Hall, 1978).

McC. Gallager (1975) studies vocabulary retention. She compared the thirty lower-class students instructed by language experience with thirty lower-class students instructed with a basal approach. This short-term study involved the teaching of three lessons in a one-week period, the experimental group received language experience treatment while the control group received basal instruction. The students were pretested, tested immediately after instruction, and tested after three weeks. No significant differences in vocabulary retention were found between treatment groups; however, the language experience group used a vocabulary that was more extensive than the basal's controlled vocabulary. Because the language topic was chosen for the children in the experimental group, the validity of the approach used as language experience can be questioned.

A partial synthesis of language experience research was done as part of a review of Becoming a Nation of Readers (Anderson, Hiebert, Wilkinson, & Scott, 1985) by Grudin (1986). As a part of their overall review of our knowledge of reading instruction,

Anderson, et al. suggested that the effects of language experience approaches have been "indifferent" (p. 45), at least compared to conventional basal reading approaches.

Few recent studies have been done comparing individualized instruction to the basal reader. The reason for this may be attributed to the fact that definitions of individualized instruction varies: some have come to be equivalent with the language experience approach. In 1987, Bader, Veatch, and Eldredge conducted five experiments to compare trade book programs with basal programs. In four Utah schools, twenty-seven second grade classrooms employed the experimental programs. Control classrooms using basals adopted by their school districts were selected from every school with an experimental program. The experiements lasted a full school year. Children in each of the programs spent the same amount of time in reading instruction, about eighty minutes each day worked in with other language activities. A pretest-posttest control group research design was used.

Their findings indicated that in comparison of the five experimental programs with their control counterparts, three of the experimental programs made siginificant gains over the traditional programs. The use of children's literature to teach children to read had a strong effect upon student's achievement and interest in reading.

Stahl and Miller (1988) examined thirty-nine studies comparing the language experience approach to other approaches. Their summary stated, "Today, the question should not be whether the language experience approach is effective, but when it is effective and what it is effective for. From the data reviewed, it appears that language experience has an important function early in the process of learning to read, but as the child's needs shift, language experience becomes less effective (unless it continues as

creative writing). It could also be the philosophy behind the language experience approach that the function of reading is to communicate, needs to be learned by children early, but once learned, children need to be able to decode written language fluently and automatically in order to be able to use reading for that purpose" (p. 23).

LIMITATIONS OF RECENT STUDIES

It is quite obvious from research studies involving reading approaches that it is not possible to conclude which one is best. When an evaluation is made of the research that has been reported on the success and failure-of the advantages and disadvantages-it is evident that the multiplicity of variables that are uncontrolled in most research (often it would be near impossible to control some of these variables; for example, teacher attitude) almost certainly makes comparisons on the basis of research unreliable.

Another significant factor that must be considered is the various populations and the socioeconomics-cultural makeup of our schools. Even when a variety of schools are used, the applicability to a school in another city would have to be looked at carefully.

Teacher observation and judgment have always been interesting and helpful. However, the background and attitude of a particular teacher is certainly a "color judgment", as Auckerman (1984) calls it. Another thing that must be accounted for in teacher variances is the influence of administration on outcomes of certain studies (i.e. student attitudes reflect teacher attitudes, therefore student attitudes will be rated above average).

If one could factor out the influence of differences in intelligence and experiential background of groups of children, then their scores could be more accurately compared with others.

Comparisons of children's reading achievement scores in a particular school system with scores on standardized tests usually provide some measures that can be used. This data should always be studied not just as a comparison with a national norm, but in view of the socioethnic composition of the particular schools (Auckerman, 1984).

When comparing achievement scores, one must consider professional integrity. The recent emphasis on test scores to evaluate teacher's progress has caused some teachers to feel they need to "help" children on tests. This is hard for us, as educators, to swallow, but it must be considered a factor.

Many research studies did not include important factors such as definition of "reading", age, grade level, and other important characteristics of the population.

One must also include novelty as a problem of recent studies. As Chall (1967) points out, human subjects are affected by being studied-that merely paying attention to them, as is done in an experimental situation, makes them perform better. She also cites that in classroom comparisons, the experimental group often attracts the more imaginative and able teachers.

CONCLUSIONS

In looking at how much credibility we can put into reading research in this area, it is clear from the limitations of research that many factors affect this. These factors must be considered carefully when applying research to your own particular situation.

When it comes to teaching reading, many approaches are advocated. Research studies, from time to time, have supported particular practices of certain teachers, or may have contributed to practical decisions concerning materials and methods.

The important changes in approach that characterize the history of the teaching of reading in the schools have grown out of the earnest struggle of teachers to find better ways of helping children (Fries, 1963).

During the past twenty years, the concern for reading development has increased among parents and community as well as educators. This has brought about an increase in the number of research studies developed to test reading approaches.

IMPLICATIONS TO TEACHERS TODAY

The teacher's choice of reading approach often represents an interpretation of the teacher's basic belief or philosophy of reading (Southgate, 1970). If a teacher is an advocate and believes in a particular approach, that teacher has the ability to make that approach work for her.

The current debate concerning various reading approaches may be overdrawn, especially if one realizes that many teachers are eclectic in their approach to reading instruction (McCullough, 1980).

A wide range of capacities, abilities, needs, and interests in any classroom necessitates a differentiated approach to instruction at all school levels and in all areas of learning.

A teacher should take advantage of good reading practices and do whatever she can to help a child learn to read. Different approaches are appropriate in different situations, and the teacher should do what she finds is best for the child.

There is considerably more to an excellent reading program than one method: numerous components of the curriculum must receive attention if the goal of universal literacy is to be achieved (Samuels & Pearson, 1988).

Although building an excellent reading program is difficult and time consuming, the goal is so important that it is worth the effort.

While there is research documentation throughout history about the effects of various reading approaches, it appears research is still needed in these areas with extensive effort to control variables.

REVISITING RESEARCH

How have early studies in reading approaches influenced recent studies?

The educational research of the last forty years has had little effect in originating new approaches to the teaching of reading.

Few new approaches to the teaching of reading have been introduced since the early 1930's. Extensive research has been done in all three major approaches (Language Experience, Basal, and Individualized) over time. Earlier studies had many more limitations than recent ones. All studies, both past and present, had variables that were difficult, if not impossible to control.

While there is research documentation throughout time about the effects of various approaches to teaching reading, it appears that we must look very critically at this research to determine its validity.

The First Grade Studies, although full of limitations, have been the biggest attempt so far, to compare reading approaches. These classical studies have significance still today. These studies brought the question of reading approaches to the top of educators' minds. Later studies have attempted to replicate particular studies.

Earlier studies have also shown us the importance of controlling variables in educational research. We are attempting to do a better job of this in research today.

The greatest trend from the past to the present seems, by this observer, to be a move toward individualized instruction. We have seen that basal readers have been used as a crutch for many teachers. This integrated or eclectic approach to teaching reading has made some staunch advocates of a particular approach step back and admit that each approach has a particular place in education today.

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